

Remarks of Clare Taylor
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Before the Education Committee
On Senate Bill 24, Section 28 & 29
Certification and teacher tenure

February 21, 2012

Good afternoon, Senator Stillman and Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee. My name is Clare Taylor, and I'm a fifth grade teacher in West Hartford. I am here today to comment on Senate Bill 24, Section 28 and 29.

It concerns me that the focus on the education gap and inequities within our education system in the state are seen as a teacher issue. Times are changing, and we need to adjust and reevaluate but we must do it through joint forces and collaboration. This is a complex problem that needs change and support from every direction. The knowledge and expertise of teachers must not be removed from the equation.

Teacher training and creating effective administrator evaluations can help teachers be effective and keep up with new methods and standards. In order to adapt to and implement changes, teachers need sufficient training and support in implementing these new standards. Teachers who are struggling need to be coached and trained first. Senate Bill 24's proposal to make performance and salary increase based on the principals' sole judgment is concerning. The art of evaluation is subjective. I have seen what an effective evaluation can do for a teacher and how quickly teachers can change when they are supported. Tenure does not make schools keep

ineffective teachers. In every business non performing employees are retrained, coached and let go if job performance is not improved. The challenge with teaching is how do we measure job performance? Using test scores to measure teachers is a blatant misuse of data. My daughter has special needs and I want her teachers to help her grow and reach her highest potential. I do not want them to rate her as failing if she doesn't get the same score as her peers. I definitely don't want the teacher to be judged as failing if my daughter's scores are low. Each teacher she will have will have many strengths to offer. Teachers can't be rated by the students who are placed in their classroom. How they help those children grow and progress does show how effective they are at teaching children. Just as we don't judge dentists on the number of cavities their patients have. Teaching is based on people and there is no cookie cutter machine that will output the same function and result. Children are influenced beyond the classroom in ways that teachers could never control and should never be held responsible for.

Teaching is one of the few professions where experience can be seen as a liability. I came into teaching after working twenty years in business, and I have worked with both veteran and beginning teachers for thirteen years. Each type of teacher offers valuable tools and skills to students. In dealing with the challenges of teaching sometimes the experience gained from years in the field is invaluable. They have maturity that comes from age, and the knowledge base from teaching hundreds of children. I have also enjoyed the exuberance of the newly trained teacher but saw how quickly they burned out. The workload in the first years can be overwhelming making new teachers question their effectiveness. Sufficient time, resources, and access to veteran teachers are critical to their success. I believe teacher retention to be one of the biggest issues in public education today. Nearly 50 percent of new teachers leave in their first five years of

teaching. I wanted a career that made a difference and gave back to the world so I re-careered into teaching from corporate marketing. Teaching is the hardest job I have ever had with the greatest amount of responsibility. Unfortunately, it is also the lowest paying position I've held. Our society values teachers but fails to show that value monetarily. My student's enthusiasm about learning and life is my daily reward for being a teacher, It is not my paycheck.

Teaching is more than a career for me; it's a way of life. My involvement with school extends into the community and influences my home and family life. My community involvement is connected to the classroom and my students are engaged in service learning projects that play an important role in our town. I have had incredible satisfaction from teaching, and from day one I have done much more than show up. Teachers take both physical and emotional work home every night. We juggle students, curriculum, grading, parents, colleagues, and administrators every day. We are committed to continuing our own education, and as soon as we implement a new system the system is changing.

I ask the committee to include teachers in the process of education reform. Evaluation standards should be consistent throughout the state. They should not be used as a test but as a tool for improvement. We are not adversaries, but allies. The shared goal is success for all of Connecticut's children and working together is the best solution. When teachers feel challenged, but know they have support, they will rise to the challenge. Teachers need to be on professional development committees. They should be encouraged to collaborate and not compete, and test scores should be used to measure student growth not teacher effectiveness. Thank you for listening and for seriously considering my perspective.